

used metaphors, others recognized systems of belief, to objectify their "delusions" -- or simply to cope with the difficulties of living.

Mrs. DeVere's "Theosophy" seems to have served such a function -- and been discarded when it no longer served it. It provided a vehicle for her experiences, for "voices" that were sometimes a bit too convenient, if not "rational" (for these and other "delusions" she was diagnosed with "Catatonic Dementia Praecox" in February of 1911). They reproduced snippets of conversation that might have been real, phrases that could as easily have been lifted from Rider Haggard as Madame Blavatsky. In her letter to Dr. Forster of November 2 1, 1911, they told her to "escape through window" when she dreamt of (or really saw) a cab coming to take her to the Asylum, or ordered her to "lie down" when she got tired of housework.

In an undated letter to her husband theosophy provided a means of not being afraid, a "plane" where "you are without fear," an ideal of "wisdom and control" when it must have been painfully obvious to her that she had little control or power of any kind, and a "symbolic" means of talking about and describing and thereby ordering her own life -- at a safe distance. Thus she could discuss her husband's tendency to frustrate her -- at least some of which, to judge from his correspondence with the Superintendent, must have been real -- but in "Theosophical" terms of his helping the "dweller" block her at the threshold of wisdom. She claimed that "You were made one of her [the "dweller's"] instruments of torture." She claimed that the "solution" to her problems "[lay] in the Astral light" -- perhaps a metaphor for understanding, or for her own point of view. She believed that this understanding "light" illuminated "the terrible mental torture I was put through in that house." Her theosophy seems to have been partly a reaction to an insufferable home life, complicated by in-laws whose hostility and aggressiveness is eloquently attested to by their correspondence in her file.

Some of the above episodes, and some of the events leading up to her first admission, appear "filtered" through a long hand-written piece on Theosophy. They become the garbled content of a "hypnotic trance" induced on Dr. McKichan's couch, either shortly before or after the hysterical episode that precipitated her committal. She explains that the doctors (presumably including Dr. McKichan himself) are now practising the "mind-healing" techniques of the